

# Iowa Commission on the Status of Women

A Division of the Department of Human Rights

January 2005

The Iowa Commission on the Status of Women (ICSW) seeks to assure equality for Iowa women. As an advocate, the Commission works to equalize women's opportunities and to promote full participation by women in the economic, political and social life of the state.

The Iowa Commission on the Status of Women was made a statutory agency in 1972, following several years as a Governor's Commission. In 1986 the ICSW became a division in the newly created Department of Human Rights, an umbrella agency in which Commissions maintain their visibility and autonomy. Nine citizens are appointed by the Governor (and confirmed by the Senate) to four-year terms on the Commission; serving *ex officio* are four legislators and the director of the Department of Human Rights. The Commission's executive director is the administrator of the Division, appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. She and two other staff members, plus interns and grant-funded positions, enable the division to implement the program and policy as determined by the Commission.

The ICSW's mandate in the *Code of Iowa* includes ***study of the changing needs and problems of the women of this state and development and recommendation of programs and constructive action to the Governor and the General Assembly.*** This is done annually, following a public hearing on issues of concern to women. Advocacy for these proposals is done on an ongoing basis, including areas of aging and long-term care, economics, education, government, health, insurance, justice, violence against women, and welfare.

In addition, the Commission's program that fulfills the duties of its broad mandate includes the following:

***Serves as a clearinghouse on programs and agencies operating to assist women.*** The *IoWoman*, a bimonthly newsletter printed by the Friends of the ICSW, provides more than 8,500 persons and organizations (2,000 by e-mail) with information on programs, services and issues of concern to women. Information and referrals are provided directly by staff on such issues as legal rights, employment, sexual harassment, education, credit, welfare, domestic violence, rape, pending legislation, government, housing and gender balance. Direct staff contacts with individuals, programs and agencies totaled almost 4,000 in FY2004, about 175 of those being individuals at-risk or experiencing discrimination and over 1,300 for information and/or referral.

***Cooperates with governmental agencies to assist them in equalizing opportunities between men and women in employment and in expanding women's rights and opportunities.*** Represents the needs of women on interagency task forces. Collaborates on studies of wage disparity and of wages and benefits for workers in predominately female jobs, including certified nurse assistants and other direct care workers. Developed harassment sheets with Iowa Civil Rights Commission.

***Serves as the central permanent agency for the development of services for women.*** The Commission assisted in the formation of the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault. Administers funds for training of criminal justice personnel, community professionals, service providers, and the public on issues of domestic violence and sexual assault, through the two coalitions.

Services developed by the ICSW include employment-related projects, such as the Paycheck Negotiation Workshop and advocacy for pay equity and nontraditional, higher-paying jobs for women.

The ICSW maintains an advocacy directory on issues of concern to women, enabling persons and groups to make contact with others who share a particular interest or area of expertise.

Federal funding through a Department of Justice Challenge Grant is enabling the ICSW to focus on female juvenile justice, including a major conference for girl-serving professionals. Publications include information on gender-specific services for girls.

***Publishes and disseminates information relating to women***, such as *Iowa Women and the Law* (in English and Spanish); *Status of Iowa Women Report*; *Divorce: Things to Consider*; *How to Get Your Bearings. How to Get a Job*; *Sexual Harassment in the Workplace/ Housing/Education*; *Small Business Resources*; *Annual Report*; *Why Not Women?* (on nontraditional jobs); *Sexism in Education*; *Iowa Women's Hall of Fame*; and the *IoWoman*.

Sponsors educational programs to recognize and inform the public about outstanding women and their significant contributions. Inducts four women into the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame annually since 1975. Awards the Cristine Wilson Medal for Equality and Justice. Promotes activities statewide for Women's History Month. Enables over 3,000 middle school students statewide to participate in the "Write Women Back into History" Essay Contest. The Governor or Lt. Governor presents awards to nine to 11 young people for their essays about a woman of significance, and winners are introduced in the House and Senate. The State Historical Society and Department of Education cosponsor. Special awards are given for essays on women in science and engineering and on a woman in public service or volunteerism.

***Cooperates with public and private agencies in joint efforts to study and resolve problems relating to the status of women***, serving on the Iowa Juvenile Home Foundation, Friends of Iowa Women Prisoners, Iowa Human Needs Advocates, Iowa CareGivers Association, Lt. Governor's Council on Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse Death Review Team, Coalition Against Abusive Lending, etc.

***Provides assistance to organized efforts by communities, organizations, associations, and other groups working toward the improvement of women's status***. Presents to organizations on the status of women, key issues, and the ICSW. Hosts a website including information on the ICSW, publications, etc.

Grants to agencies that serve displaced homemakers, single parents, and female offenders are administered by the ICSW, and assistance is provided to their staff members. Pre-employment services were provided to 1,402 Iowans in Transition in FY2004, with 55% going into post-secondary training..

The ICSW participates in the National Association of Commissions for Women and Iowa is recognized for its progressive legislation and programs, which are directed toward improving the status of women.